

Lucas In Love by inclelucy

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Summary: This story takes place during their Senior Year, 1988. Mike goes through a phase which caused him to cool off with Eleven. Lucas, who has been in love with Eleven since 4 years ago became El's shoulder to cry on. As Lucas helps Eleven through this problem, he also struggles to keep his feelings bottled up and fight the urge to steal her from his best friend Mike.

1. Prologue

I know that a lot of the fans ship Mileven, I do too, but the latest social media updates and interviews, and interactions between Millie and Caleb were just so darn cute! I adore their friendship! I just had to do this... Lucas's character is one of my favorites and I especially liked the part in Season 1 when he and El finally came to good terms- that was so precious!

This is just a prologue though, I'll try to update Chapter 1 tomorrow.

(Disclaimer: this is totally not connected to my other story The Dark Princess)

Thanks in advance!

Prologue

The group consisting of Mike, Will, Dustin, Lucas and El are still as tight as ever.

The boys have been doing pretty well since freshman year, thanks to their popularity that had escalated since they saved the town from the mysterious epidemic that had plagued the town five years ago. Most of the people know that they used Science and their wit to accomplish that, but of course the people involved know that it was because of Eleven- the unsung hero who was finally given liberty by the State after her heroic act on the condition that she will not use her abilities again.

Mike has been exceptional and became the president of the student council, co-chief editor of the school paper, president of the Science Club and a consistent honor student. Will became an artist for their school paper and is seriously considering an Art Major in college. Dustin has been pretty serious with the AV club and has recruited more members including Eleven, of course. Then there's Lucas, whose agility and physical strength increased dramatically at the mere onset of puberty.

Although Mike was the tallest, Lucas was the most athletic and

became the football team's wide receiver at freshman year. Despite his jock status, he still maintains to be an A+ student and of course, a member of the AV club. With Eleven joining them at school as a freshman on their sophomore year after a rigorous home study program, their lives have never been happier and interesting.

While Mike serves as El's knight- loving her tenderly and protecting her from this cruel world, Dustin his partner in crime who would trick her into using her "abilities" for pranks and silly stuff even though they're strictly prohibited by the state, and Will her BFF/step-brother-her confidante in times of self-doubt and her companion in her sleepless nights, Lucas has portrayed a different role. He has always been El's mentor. He was like his big brother in the group.

He would persuade her to try new things, to learn how to defend herself, to be strong, to be angry and to face her fears. He would do this in less conventional ways though, like one time when she got mad at Mike, she asked El to throw tennis balls at him using her physical strength and not her mind - to release her anger. The result was tragic since El wasn't able to control herself and threw the last tennis ball telepathically which landed solidly on Lucas's face breaking his nose. Lucas insisted on not telling anyone about it since it might get El in trouble and it became their secret since.

Lucas wasn't able to go to school for a week but he thought it was worth it. That week, El visited him everyday at home since El was still home-schooled then, and he wished it didn't end. They watched some movies, listened to music and played some board games and they had a blast. That was the time he started feeling it. He realized that he was too busy seeing El as his best friend that he didn't want to acknowledge the fact that it might be more than that. He did not entertain the feeling though and thought it was just a pathetic puppy love. He was, just thirteen years old that time, anyway.

He also knew back then that Eleven is special to Mike, and if there's anything that would break their friendship, a girl would definitely be the last on the list. He thought the feeling would fade away eventually. However, that one week was sacred to Lucas.

On their junior year, Mike prepared a grand Valentine's gift for Eleven. They all pitched in their ideas, Lucas giving some he wished

he could also give El someday, but he knew it was impossible. He especially suggested for Mike to give El a pet cat. Mike refused the idea at first stating that El has a history with cats. Lucas explained that he has to help El get over her past. He said that even if El and the Hoppers have a pet dog at home, a dog doesn't really match El's personality. According to Lucas, a cat is neater, which matches El's compulsiveness for cleanliness, a cat doesn't make a lot of noise and could be extra clingy, which El needs for comfort and security. His three friends were shocked with how well he thought it out and how sensitive he could get to Eleven's needs.

He just gave them a shrug and avoided Mike's awkward stare. Mike said he will think about it.

On Valentine's Day, Eleven got a black Persian cat and she was ecstatic! She named him Shadow.

After their much anticipated date, Mike called the gang before bedtime and excitedly told them that he and El are officially a couple.

The next day, for the first time in three years, Lucas missed a football match.

2. She's not OK

Chapter 2: She's not OK

Mike and Eleven have been dating for almost two years now, with their second anniversary only three months away.

For the past two years, Lucas has acted normally, being careful not to step into any issues Mike and El get into in their relationship. He knows he has no right to intervene but his arms are always open every time El asks for his advice.

El has always been thankful for the time Lucas gives her despite his busy life- football, studies, AV club, and even if Lucas has multiple networks of friends, even in other schools, Lucas would cancel anything just to listen to El's boring stories about her love life. He was there when El started to feel jealousy, insecurity, and low self-esteem, even during the first time she had PMS.

Not that Mike couldn't deal with those, it's just that Mike could sometimes be a little dense. He is a pure human being after all. He thought that by protecting El from the world, and by controlling the things that El could know, she would never ever feel those unpleasant things. Mike would be vexed at anyone who would try to educate El of this "worldly" sentiments, which caused an uproar or two between him and his sister Nancy. He was called selfish by Lucas at one point and they didn't talk to each other for a week. Knowing how sensitive that issue is to Mike, Dustin and Will did not attempt to meddle.

As such, El feels ashamed when she actually does feel those awful things, so she learned to turn to Lucas, who would laugh and console her every time she tells him how ugly she thinks she is and that she could never be good enough for Mike.

If you only knew how perfect you are, Lucas always thought.

Lucas has a lot of pretty and popular admirers in school, but he could never look at anyone the same way he looks at El. He would date someone every now and then, his longest would be for a month. Sometimes, he would break up with them once he realizes they're

nothing like El. Some would break up with him because he has this habit of ditching anyone for this someone. Yes, he would abandon, ditch and cancel on anyone for this girl named El.

The amusing turn of events began on a perfectly normal November twilight. Lucas got a call from El.

"Lucas..."

"Yes, El? Umm... I'm gonna be heading to school now for football practice...What's up?"

"Oh, okay, I'll just call you back, bye..."

Lucas knows there's something wrong just with the tone of El's voice. "Wait, El. Is everything okay? Where are you? Where's Mike?"

"I'm at home. It's about Mike..."

"Oh? What about...? Ok, wait, I'm gonna call you back." Lucas said then immediately dialed their coach's office number after hanging up.

"Umm Coach! Lucas here... I might have to skip practice to-"

"Lucas you can't! Next week's game is crucial we need you to be here for the practice tonight!"

"I'm sorry coach I really really had to do something important..."

"No you don't. I'll see you in 30 minutes!"

"Coach! Coach!" *Dammit.* Lucas dialed El's home phone number this time.

"Hello?"

"Eleven, get ready I'll pick you up, bye!"

Lucas drove to Mirkwood to go to the Byers/Hopper house and just when he was about to turn on the corner, he saw Eleven standing awkwardly on the road, with her arms draped into her torso, her hands rubbing her forearms. Lucas immediately went out of his car

and opened the passenger door-a gesture he reserves only for El. He couldn't care less if it's another girl but he'd always open the door for Eleven.

"Hey why'd you have to go here, it's cold outside! I said I'll pick you up from your house."

Eleven went in, and Lucas followed.

"I just thought you were in a hurry." Eleven gave him a faint smile and Lucas almost clutched his heart.

They were just silent for a few minutes, waiting for whoever starts the conversation first, and when Lucas can't take it anymore, he started to open his mouth.

"I'm sorry El, I couldn't bail practice today, but you can just wait for me and we'll talk about it later, alright?" El nodded.

"Are you okay?" Lucas asked. Instead of answering, El simply closed her eyes and leaned her head back on the car seat.

She's not okay. He knows because that kind of action had always been El's way of controlling her emotions, so Lucas let her be until they arrived at school.

Lucas parked at the school grounds, turned off the ignition and gave it a couple of minutes before interrupting El in her meditation.

"Eleven?" Lucas said as tenderly as possible. The girl slowly opened her eyes, and when she did, a stream of tears fell down her cheeks and she started sobbing. She had been trying hard not to cry since she left the house and with Lucas saying her name like that, she can't help but wallow in self-pity and dejection.

While Eleven was drowning in her vulnerability, Lucas, just like in all the other times El have cried in front of him in the past, was just sitting upright, not looking at El, just staring at the football field in front of them but not really seeing anything, not saying a word, and just fighting the urge to go out of the car and break something, or someone, since it always broke his heart to see this precious and delicate woman cry. But he had to be strong, trying so much not to

pull Eleven into his arms, mainly because he did not want to startle El which could lead to his demise, and second, because he had never touched El ever since he caught those feelings. He never hugged her since then, not even once. They accidentally held hands one time when they went boating at the lake last year and the sensation sent shivers down his spine that he wasn't able to sleep that night. For him, when it comes to El, touching is sacred. And he respects El so much that he would never take advantage of her.

"Lucas, I think you need to go there now, you might miss your practice." El said between sobs, wiping her eyes with the back of her right hand just like a child. Lucas just looked at him with a morose expression.

"But El.."

"I'm gonna be fine... if you miss your practice I'm gonna feel worse."

"Alright... but you have to go with me."

"Can't I just stay here in your car?"

"I don't want you alone here."

"I'll get out when I'm ready, I promise."

"You don't have to promise Eleven, I know you will... I'll wait for you, just sit in one of those bleachers there and I don't know, maybe you can cheer for me or something" Lucas said, that time more relaxed and even smiling a little which caused the mood to lighten up a bit.

El, who caught a whiff of how Lucas is trying to cheer her up then said: "You know I'm no cheerleader material Lucas."

"C'mon, you don't have to do cartwheels or raise your pompoms or shout your lungs out, just be there... that's enough." Lucas said sincerely.

This caused Eleven to smile widely showing her crooked teeth, which Lucas finds most attractive. It had always been one of El's greatest insecurity in her body, but for Lucas, it was her perfect feature.

God, she's beautiful, Lucas thought. He just sat there looking at El and he suddenly had the urge to just kiss her, right then and there. But his four years of self-restraint had proven effective once more as he opened his door before he can even lurch forward to El.

Sigh. "You can stay here, or you can go out, it's up to you as long as YOU know you're okay in here."

"I know I'm okay in here Lucas... Go... They're waiting for you."

Lucas looked at the football field with his teammates assembled on it and his head coach looking at their direction with his arms crossed. He knew he was late and it would probably cause him 30 push-ups at least, maybe 50 push-ups tops.

But at that moment, he just looked back at his car and took one last glance at the girl inside, ran to the field and never in his life had he been that psyched to receive an imminent punishment.

3. The Lake

Eleven finally reveals the truth about what happened between him and Mike. Lucas is determined to help her despite his own feelings.

Chapter 3: The Lake

Football practice ended after three hours. El didn't come out of the car. I offered to take her home but she said she wanted to go to the lake.

The Lake. It used to be the gang's hideout. The chief's trailer house stayed there when he moved in with the Byers, and it provided sanctuary to us all. We even had some of our campaigns there. However, lately, it's become more of El and I's. Will is busy with his girlfriend Jennifer Hayes. Dustin was traumatized. He was bit by a snake there last year. And Mike just got over it. But we didn't. This is after all, where it all started. If I hadn't been hurt by El here four years ago, then I wouldn't have spent that one week with her. For Eleven, on the other hand, this lake brings comfort since it became her first home.

We're now on the front porch, with El sitting on the swing that the chief set up especially for her a month after she came back from the Upside Down. I sit on a white wooden chair a few feet away from her. We're just facing the lake, admiring its beauty. El has never said a word. She is shivering.

"Aren't you cold?"

"I am, but I like it. Makes me feel something."

That's odd. Knowing how Eleven hates the cold. I don't know if I can take it any longer so I decide to just ask her.

"Would you like to talk about it now...?" Not a reply... She seems lost in her thoughts.

"We have to talk about it.... Eleven!" She looks at me in defeat

knowing she has to start talking now.

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"We had a fight, a week ago... I saw him with Louise at the library. It was nothing. I knew but I still got jealous and he got mad and he said that's what happens when I—"

"When you what?"

"When I talk to you... so I got mad more, and then I said I didn't want to see his face. He said fine... After two days I went to his house to say sorry and he was there... and Louise. Again. They were in the basement."

"Were they doing something?" She glares at me for asking that, obviously repulsed just at the thought of Mike doing something with another girl. I just shrug and roll my eyes. It's almost funny.

"No... they were doing that Science project."

"And...?"

"I got mad again and...and..." She's starting to break into tears now.

"And what?" I ask seriously.

"And I messed up what they were doing... the project. So Mike got mad." *I'd get mad too. What if Louise saw her?*

"Of course he'd be mad... An outsider shouldn't be able to see what you can do, El."

"Louise didn't suspect anything... She just thought it was an accident... But Mike wasn't concerned about me exposing myself. He was mad because he said he and Louise worked hard for the project..."

"We talked and he yelled at me... he was furious and said I was selfish. I just ran home. We never talked to each other after that, but I missed him so bad, so yesterday I talked to him and he said he wanted to take a break from everything... That...", she hesitates to

continue.

"What did he say?" I urged.

"That for five years he doesn't know what he wants to do... with his life... and now he feels tired looking out for someone who doesn't care about his feelings. That's not true, Lucas. He's the most important person in my life."

I can feel my face burning. *Tired? What the hell Mike?*

"It's not your fault."

"It's entirely my fault." She stopped crying now and the depression turned to remorse.

"But he should have known when he signed up for this... especially when he asked to be your boyfriend. We all promised to protect you... He can't just bail out on you like this... I'm gonna talk to him, let's go."

I stand up and walk towards her

"No." She said firmly.

"Yes, we will." I was about to head out of the porch when three of the other white chairs make their way in front of me blocking my way. I look back at her with her hand up. Sometimes her nose would still bleed but tonight it doesn't.

"No Lucas, please, I don't want him to know." She pleads.

"You don't want him to know that you're talking to me about this? How messed up is that? So he just want you to go through this alone?"

"Promise me you won't talk to him, please."

I step back knowing that if I move towards her any further I could get hurt, and El would feel bad about herself again. I can't do that to her. So I just start to go back to my chair and slumped noisily, like a five year old deprived of cookies.

"I'm not good with promises, El. You know that."

We didn't say anything for a few minutes until finally, El initiates on breaking the silence between us.

"I think Mike is ready to move on Lucas. I think he's had it enough with me. Can you imagine how hard it must have been...for him? To babysit someone for, for five years?"

We start finishing each other's sentences. We used to do this for fun before, but now, it's completely different.

"To try to educate, protect and love someone before yourself?" I said. *That's me.*

"He never even had his own life." El added. *That's also me.*

"He made all his decisions considering what's good for you and only you." The words coming out of my mouth cutting deep now knowing I'm not talking about Mike anymore but about myself.

"He's very tired... I can feel it. I can see it." El hushed in a whisper. *That will never be me.*

For a moment I was lost in my own thoughts. That exchange made me realize that I, too, must have been doing things in consideration of El and Mike. To protect their sacred relationship at the expense of my own happiness. The only difference is, with me, nobody knows, and even if I'd like to be tired of it, I just can't. I've fallen deep, but I don't wanna save myself, and I just wanna keep on falling. *I'm screwed.*

"He needs to get a break, I respect that, but I don't know until when..." El says aloud this time which finally brings me back to life.

"Then you just have to wait, I guess... I don't know maybe Mike's just got a lot in his hands right now. Look, just think of it this way. You're still together but he won't be there for quite some time. Not a big deal okay?"

"But I don't know how to live without him..." *What about me?*

"Yes you do El." I'm starting to get angry and I don't know why. "Since Mike is taking his time building his own life, then it's the perfect time for you to build your own... Get a hobby, make some new friends."

"You mean, get a life?" El replies. Her pun is so innocent but so true and I can't help but give in to a small laugh. The annoyance building inside me vanishes in a split second.

"One thing I can assure you: Mike loves you. You should have seen him when you disappeared 5 years ago, he was so depressed everybody thought he was about to go crazy. That's how much you mean to him. Trust him."

Her expression was blank. She just looks at me and for a moment I was scared that this suffering has rendered her emotionless. She looks at me with soulless eyes.

"People can change... you said so yourself. You changed. Will and Dustin. I changed... Maybe Mike..." El say.

I don't know how to help her, and most of the time if I find myself clueless on how I can be of use to her, I just ask.

"Tell me Eleven... How can I help you?"

She just looks up and stares at me. I must have looked so stupid that I can see a smile forming on her lips.

"Keep me warm?" She moves to the side of the swing and motions her head towards her side obviously inviting me to sit beside her.

"Oh, so you want to feel warm now?" I lazily lean back on my chair to declare that I'm not interested.

"Yes, I don't wanna be cold anymore. I can feel again without it. Thanks to you." I do not bulge. Not until I hear the words that she always use to taunt me. This girl knows me very well.

"What? Are you afraid of me?" As soon as I hear it I stand up and walk towards her while shaking my head out of defeat. She hasn't stopped smiling and it was the most beautiful thing in the world.

I sit down beside her carefully trying not to look nervous when deep inside my heart is beating like hell.

"I will never be afraid of you..." She knows it's true.

I'm afraid of me. I'm afraid that if I get too close I'll do something stupid.

She leans her head on my shoulder and I try to relax so she can be comfortable.

"Lucas?"

"Yeah?"

"How do you do it?" I look at her and I can smell her hair. Her eyes are closed with that smile still painted on her long and elegant face.

"Do what?" I answer.

"Staying with me?"

"We will all do this for you El."

"We both know that's not true. I am a burden to everyone. But you, I can always turn on you, I wish..."

"Mike and I are different. He will never be me. And I will never be him. But who knows maybe someday I will feel like him too? I'll get fed up with you and I'll be bored to death with your stories... and-"

Before I can finish, Eleven slides her hand into my arm and tugs at my sweater. She holds my arm tight. It's almost painful. It's beautifully painful.

"No, Lucas... Don't... don't say that..."

"I'm sorry, I was just kidding." She loosens her grip a little bit.

Of course I won't.

4. The Mouthbreather

Lucas talked to Mike about Eleven.

Eleven and Mike tried to talk things out but it led to a messy confrontation,

with Lucas being caught in between.

Chapter 4: The Mouthbreather

Lucas

That night in the lake was long with every moment cherished, but it had to end. I went home after taking El to hers with a smile plastered on my face, but it had to go away with the realization that that joy meant sorrow for two of my best friends. I promised El I wouldn't do it, but something had to be done. I needed to talk to Mike.

I dialed his home phone number at 10 PM. I knew he'd still be awake at that time but I didn't expect him to answer the call. When he did, his voice was hoarse, and he answered with a quick and almost angry hello.

"Hi Mike, we have to talk."

"Sorry Lucas, is this important? Can we talk about this tomorrow?"

"Mike we can't, it's about Eleven."

"We'll do just fine, Lucas, please you don't have to do this. I know she had been turning to you every time we have a problem, but please, don't. Not now."

"Mike, this is different-"

"Lucas, I know that you feel like it's your obligation to help El but this is something private. Please, just don't influence her into thinking that this is a big deal. It's not. Okay?"

Influence her? I was seriously offended but I just shrugged it off.

"Well she doesn't understand that, so I'm thinking maybe we can hang out tomorrow, so you can explain that to her... She's hurting Mike. Badly." I said as calmly as possible.

"And you think I'm not? I'm hurting over this too Lucas! But my parents are going to kill me if I don't do something with my life and they're going to blame El forever!" Mike replied hysterically.

"Are you sure that's the only reason? Eleven told me about this girl... Louise?"

"Oh, she even told you about that? Ok did she tell you how she ruined our science project? How we now have to start from scratch and did I mention that I've been up for 24 hours now just trying to work on it again?"

"Yes she told me about the project."

"And?"

"Mike you have to understand..."

"No! I've been trying to understand for years Lucas... I need a break, and you of all people should understand that..."

My stomach turned and I knew I was going to flip.

"I understand you... But what I don't understand is why you can't get everything straight with Eleven! Don't leave her hanging Mike!" I shouted which got his attention.

"I..." He sighed. "Ok, I'll talk to her tomorrow. Just don't.... mind her, okay?" Then he hang up.

"What? Mike? Mike!"

Fuck. Don't mind her? What the hell was that? I almost bolted out of my house to go to Mike's to punch him in the face and knock some sense out of him but I kept my patience and realized it wouldn't do any good.

I went to bed thinking how Mike could have said that. *"Just don't*

mind her okay?" The words kept echoing in my ears and my blood boiled. I could not ever not mind her.

What displeased me the most was the fact that he had always been a hero to El. She called his name when those bad men tried to take her away, when she got caught up with the Demogorgon she said goodbye *ONLY* to him, and when she came back to Hawkins, the name "Mike" was the first word that came out of her mouth.

It was always him, and every damn time El needed something he was always too sure it was only him who was capable to give. And now, he had grown complacent, because he knows that whatever he does, he could get away with it. Because just like life itself, El needs him more than he needs her.

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However, they say you only realize someone's worth when you lose them.

Now he will definitely not lose El...

Unless someone tries to get her...

Which got me thinking...

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The odds are definitely against me... but it's an option. A very depressing option, considering I'd be willing to get totally heartbroken and take the risk of losing my best friends just to save the woman I love's relationship with another man. *How can I be more pathetic?*

Maybe there's no need to intervene now... at least, not YET.

This week, so far, has been far from okay for Eleven. She was emotionally drained and felt a little bit under the weather, probably

due to her stubbornness last night at the lake, trying to take in the cold when she knew very well she has very low tolerance to it.

Thinking of last night, El remembered the comfort she had experienced in the company of her good friend. When she felt abandoned and neglected, Lucas made her feel warm with his tender words and broad shoulder, which was the first thing she thought about when she woke up that morning.

When she unconsciously smiled and felt warm at the thought of that, she felt fuzzy and confused.

Why am I feeling this way? She thought.

The feeling was vaguely familiar and it scared her a little bit. It scared her because she felt guilty. The girl who only had eyes for Mike found it hard to decipher its true meaning, not because she was clueless about it, but because she never thought she would ever feel it... with another man.

She didn't give it much thought but was highly shaken up just with the thought of seeing Lucas that day. She knows deep down something is happening. She knows it isn't right, although she doesn't know why, and the urge to make things right with Mike again quickly surged, for this is the only thing that would make her confound feelings for Lucas stop.

El went to school and it was a perfectly boring regular day for her. For the past years, she was able to make some friends but she preferred to keep to herself during free periods- sometimes going to the library when she was not hanging out with her true friends.

She still sometimes feel depressed about the fact that she wasn't in the same year with them. She tried her best to be, but with the educational background she had at the lab and the limited amount of time she had to catch up, it was a great achievement in itself that she was only one year behind from the boys. Still, she can't help but think things would have been different if she was already a senior.

It was already lunch break and as usual, she spent it with Dustin, Will and Jen. Lucas and Mike weren't there being the busiest of them all.

When it was time for his friends to go back to their classes, El opted to stay at their lunch table in the cafeteria contemplating whether to go home or to stay.

Her friends, although having an idea about what's happening between her and Mike, did not try to poke their noses into it knowing that time will just pass by and everything will be alright, just like all the other times it happened in the past. The couple used to have arguments about anything under the sun before, and the two seemed to figure everything out on their own. However, they were all clueless that it was Lucas who always aided El in her miserable times and most of the time explained to her what to do or how to understand what she felt. Mike knew this of course which sometimes hurt his pride so El, at one point had to start consulting Lucas discreetly. Lucas never failed to break a promise and he never confronted Mike about anything. He knew his place and for that El was always thankful.

The crowd in the cafeteria slowly disappeared, and she was lost in her thoughts playing with the Jello on her plate using a fork when a man cast a shadow beside her. It was Mike.

"El?" Mike said as he started to sit across the table which saddened El for he usually sat beside her. His face was gloomy and the lack of sleep was obvious with the dark bags under his eyes. El felt more miserable.

"Mike?" She replied.

"Umm...I just realized how much of a jerk I've been for not clearing things out with you. I just really need some time to finish everything. I hope you understand." Every word gave a sting to El, but she hid it with a faint smile.

"I do now Mike... It's nice to see you. How are you?" She said sincerely.

"Well, yeah, I'm actually still very busy, and it's just... Lucas called me and he said that I should talk to you..." Mike said hesitantly. And when he saw the reaction from Eleven, he realized that he shouldn't have said that. El's small smile turned into a disappointed frown, and

Mike knew that instead of setting things straight, he messed them up. The burden grew more inside him, and he felt more tired. Tired of having to say the right things, tired of being misunderstood, tired of being perfect. El started talking and he was drawn out from his despair.

"So you mean if Lucas didn't talk to you, then you wouldn't even talk to me today?" El said, almost judgmentally.

"No of course not." He replied.

"I told him not to talk to you." *I knew it*, Mike thought. He can't help but be annoyed knowing how his girlfriend kept on bugging people about their relationship issues. Even though Lucas was their best friend, for him, it still wasn't acceptable. Mike couldn't help but blurt his sentiment out.

"Well, I guess he couldn't help it since you keep running to him every time we have a problem. You can't keep bothering people like that, El."

"What?" El replied obviously repulsed at Mike's words.

El thought that only if Mike had been more patient in explaining things to her then she wouldn't have turned to Lucas. If only Mike didn't shrug away all of the complicated thoughts that El tried to bring up to him, then she wouldn't have to find the answers elsewhere. With Mike, everything should be simple, like the concepts of friendship, love and promises. El at times would feel like a complete imbecile when talking to Mike. Like a person incapable of understanding complex thoughts. Though she did her best to bottle up those feelings due to her love for the man, she felt the anguish now and for the first time, she thought she was truly mad at Mike.

Mike stopped himself from replying knowing very well that if he did, he would have said more that would hurt El. He just let out a big sigh.

"I need to go." El said while standing up. Mike did the same and ran behind El.

"Hey, you know I didn't mean it that way, c'mon..." Mike said. He caught up with El and grabbed her arm to stop her. El, not giving any damn to the few people still in the dining hall, stopped in her tracks, turned to Mike and glared at him sending several food trays flying all over. He dodged most of them but some of the juice, chocolate puddings and jellos didn't miss his clothes. He began to feel furious and upset with El.

"What the hell Eleven!" Mike called out. He didn't get a reply. El just turned her back and continued walking away.

"Ok El how mature! Shit!" Mike shouted kicking one or two of the chairs that blocked him on his way out.

With El walking just a few meters away from the exit door, Lucas suddenly appeared.

"Hey, El... Dustin told me you were...here... Mike? What happened?" Lucas said, looking at the distraught man.

While Eleven stopped in front of Lucas standing rigidly with eyes on the floor, breathing heavily, Mike continued his way out not minding the presence of the two.

He saw some of the food stains in Mike's plaid shirt and jeans and he had an idea that El might have had something to do with it. He looked at the faces of some people marveling at the scene and was annoyed at the careless scene the two must had been in. When Lucas knew for sure that Mike didn't have any plan of taking Eleven away from those prying eyes, he held him in his arm when he passed by.

"Mike!"

"Get off me Lucas!" Mike said brushing Lucas's hand off his arm. "I told you to stay out of it, now you only made things worse!" This time pushing Lucas on his chest causing the man to go a few steps back. Lucas just raised his arms declaring that he didn't have a plan to argue.

"Whoah! What's your problem, Mike?" Lucas said while blocking Eleven from him.

"You're the problem, Lucas. Just stay out of other people's business, would you? Just get your own life and stop brainwashing Eleven!"

"Brainwashing? She's not a kid anymore Mike! Stop treating her like one. You need to grow up!" Lucas said completely unaware of the number of people growing to witness the spectacle that he already took part in.

Mike just looked at Lucas disgustingly and said. "I'm done with you, man."

Eleven heard Mike and she muttered under her breath, "Mouthbreather..."

He bolted out the door and Lucas knew better than to run after him. *If he's done with me, then I'm done with him*, he thought. Lucas stayed with Eleven. He stared at all the people looking at them and they were gone in a second.

"Hey, are you okay? What was that all about?" Lucas said, turning to Eleven.

El slowly raised her head and looked up to Lucas.

"You promised me you won't tell Mike!" She answered.

Lucas quickly realized what happened, and he knew there'd be no sense in trying to defend himself.

"I'm sorry El but I had to... You can get mad at me all you want... but I did it for you, for Mike, and for me."

"For you? Why? Because you can't take me bothering you anymore?"

"What? No... El, I just want you to be happy again. I can't stand you being like this. I feel miserable seeing you like this..." Lucas said, and El was already on the verge of crying, feeling vulnerable again with Lucas's words, and she tried so hard not to throw herself at him.

He's doing it again, he's making me feel things that I shouldn't. What is happening? El thought.

She made herself remember how the man broke the promise he made the other night.

"You still broke your promise..." El said quietly, fighting her tears and then headed out the door.

Lucas walked behind her. "Eleven, you have to understand, please."

"Leave me alone." Eleven said with a mixture of sadness, anger and frustration in her tone.

Lucas gave up and let Eleven walk away with a feeling of defeat towards the whole thing. Only a day passed since this thing happened between Mike and Eleven, and it was getting worse, and he was being blamed.

He can't help but think that maybe they can really just figure this out on their own. Maybe El doesn't really need him. Maybe he just shouldn't care. Maybe he should really just stay out of their business.

For the first time, he grew tired. Not of El. But of himself. He thought that maybe it was about time he gave up. *Give up on what?* What exactly was he fighting for? What role does he really want to have in El's life? If he could not protect Eleven as a friend anymore, then how else?

He told himself that moment that he would give Mike a chance to make things right with El again.

If Mike can do it without his help, then he'll move on.

But if not, then he knew he had to do something. He would have to save his girl.

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Thank you for the wonderful feedbacks, I truly appreciate it!

P.S.: We all need a Lucas in our lives, don't we? LOL

XOXO -Lucy

5. Changes

Eleven made a vow to change things for herself and for the people around her. She make new friends with the most unlikely people which will get Lucas concerned.

Chapter 5: Changes

Eleven

It was a cool Friday morning and it has been one week since the confrontation happened between Mike, Eleven and Lucas, and she had never felt so desolate. She felt culpable of everything that went wrong between her and Mike, and she was downright clueless as to how things will go back to normal.

Maybe it won't, she thought, and she prepared herself for the worst.

She realized that just when she thought Mike was the last person among them to change, it was actually her. As a matter of fact, she never even did. She was still the scared, little girl and she grew tired of it. She felt exhausted of being looked upon as someone who has to be constantly supervised.

Having thought of that, she looked back at the time when Lucas advised her to expand her world, and for the first time, she had seriously considered it. Maybe *IT IS* about time. She convinced herself that she had to, but she knew it would take more than that. She had to *will* herself to do it, if she wanted to stop feeling like a liability to others. She needed to earn her self-esteem—something that she never had.

That morning, as much as Mrs. Byers didn't want to interfere, she knew that she had to talk to Eleven about Mike. Will talked to her mom the day before saying how Eleven had been completely aloof the past few days, being totally silent every time they were together at school. Even at home, Will was not able to break into El's shell. Surely El and Mike had misunderstandings before, but this was the first time it lasted so long. While having breakfast, Joyce tried to communicate with El.

"Honey, how are you?" Joyce said while eating the last of her pancake. El looked at her with emotions her mother can hardly tell. She took a few minutes to answer and Joyce waited patiently. Finally, El started to speak with a voice that obviously tries to hold back tears.

"I'm not OK. I know Will told you, but nobody else can help me...but myself..." El said. Joyce was completely surprised at the honesty of the teen, half-expecting her to deny the sorrow she had been carrying for days.

"Don't say that Eleven, just tell me, if there's anything I can do..." Joyce replied warily.

"I just told you Mom, I can figure it out by myself...I think I know what to do now. So please don't worry about me. And please don't tell him." Eleven answered knowing very well it was better not to get the chief involved.

"Are you and Mike...?"

"I think he really needs a break and I think I'm ready to give him that. I might need it for myself too. I should start building my own life." Hearing that, Joyce's face slightly lit up.

When the romance was announced to the parents almost two years ago, she wasn't the only one who wasn't pleased with it. But nobody even bothered to say something about it because it was... well, it was El. How could they hurt her by forbidding that kind of love even if it happened at such a young age?

It was a stretch, but they had no other choice but to accept it and now she can't help but feel guilty about not doing anything with it. She should have seen it coming, she thought. However, it was never too late, that's why Joyce thought that now is the perfect time for them to start letting El into the real world.

"Whatever you think is right, do it. I believe in you. I trust that you can do it. But if you need help on the way, we're right here for you. You know that right?"

"Yes." Eleven replied with a smile which warmed the heart of the woman who is now standing up to give her a hug. Joyce kissed Eleven's head while wrapping her body into an embrace which sent the girl to tears. Joyce saw the pain of a first heartbreak in her daughter's eyes and she can't help but cry with her too. Eleven let her emotions out and sobbed and cried as much as she can. She took her time and Joyce didn't let her go. When El finally stopped, Joyce released her to let her breathe and told her to get ready for school. She grabbed her keys and started towards the door when El said,

"On the other hand, I think I do need your help, Mom... You have to help me figure out what I really want to do with my life." Joyce vigorously nodded obviously agreeing with what El said. She went back to facing her daughter again and held her face up.

"What you need to do first... is to learn to love yourself... You are a wonderful woman with a pure heart Eleven. You can be anything you want to be." Joyce said, who was quite happy with how things were turning out for Eleven.

Sure she wasn't thrilled about the fact that she was heartbroken, especially since it was with Mike, who was almost like a son to her, but deep down she knew that there was never really a time for El to discover herself. The moment she came back from the Upside Down, everybody was just too focused and busy on having her catch-up with the world. Every time she went through something, she always had the boys to turn to, especially Mike. She was protected from everything and everyone.

Her little girl is now becoming a lady, and she vowed not just to be there, but to trust her all the way.

When Eleven woke up that morning, she was on a mission: To start making things right. She knew she can't make changes with her life as quickly as she wanted but at least she wanted to move on with a light heart. She believed that she would eventually get back together with Mike. She just didn't know when. So she planned to talk to him again during the weekend. But one thing that still gives her a heavy heart was her guilt towards Lucas. She felt bad about not understanding how Lucas just wanted the best for her when he broke his promise, which made her think about one other thing. Promises.

Are those really necessary? Should we really always make a promise? Is this why Lucas loathes them? El thought.

After her classes, on a late Friday afternoon, Eleven went to the football field to face Lucas and give him her long overdue apology. She missed him so much and even though she can see him every day, she made sure that he never saw her. She have made a couple of attempts to call him, or even talk to him at school, but she couldn't bring herself to do it. This was also the first time that Lucas never made the first move to talk to her, and she felt really upset at the prospect of losing him, too.

So she waited on the bleachers for a good 10 minutes and tried to find her friend but she couldn't, and she was disappointed. What she could see though, is a group of cheerleaders practicing across the field and she recognized some of them, especially Cindy- the most popular girl in her class, who happened to be Lucas's ex-girlfriend. She took the courage to approach them reminding herself that it is a part of the change she'd imposed upon herself.

Cindy and her two best friends- at least, as what El assumed them to be, saw her coming, exchanged some whispers and welcomed her with a big smile. El had trouble understanding whether those smiles were supposed to be friendly or not, but she smiled back anyway.

"Hey El!" Cindy said. *She is so pretty*, El thought. Her olive skin was shining and the curls at the tip of her brown hair looked just like those of the princesses she saw at the fairy tale books she read when she was a little girl. When she became Lucas's girlfriend a few months back, El felt so insecure that she didn't feel like talking to Lucas for days. When they finally broke up several months ago, she felt a little happy. She didn't know why and she didn't tell a soul.

"Hi. Good to see you..."

"El, we have classes together everyday silly! This is Laney and Shelley. " Cindy said.

"Hi." El said to the other two.

"You're here to see Lucas?" The girl named Shelley said. She had red

hair and she was the tallest of them all. She was also quite pretty especially with her big eyes.

"Umm, yes..." El answered trying her best to keep eye contact with them while feeling so small and awkward.

"We saw you last week, you were waiting in his car during football practice?" Cindy asked.

Eleven nodded and the third girl named Laney spoke for the first time.

"You're Mike's girlfriend right? I mean, ex-girlfriend?" Laney asked curiously. Laney, the blonde, with her arms crossed seemed to be the least friendly of them all. However, that was the least of El's concern. She knew that most people knew about her and Mike but she was quite baffled at how she referred to her as Mike's ex. The confusion must have been pretty evident so Laney followed it up.

"Louise told me, she's my stepsister. She's also a senior and she and Mike are kinda close now, they're both going to MIT I think." She said matter-of-factly and Cindy looked intriguingly at her.

"So, you're tight with your sister now?" Cindy asked Laney.

"What? Hell no... and it's STEP-SISTER. She kept talking about it on the phone with her friends. I overheard her last night." Laney answered.

"You mean you were eavesdropping?" Shelley said which caused a small laughter between the three. Eleven suddenly got a headache from hearing the name Louise, especially at the fact that Louise knew what was going on between her and Mike. If it were her, she'd just run away, but she remembered that only the old El would do that. She thought of the reason why she spoke to the girls anyway.

"Where's Lucas?" She asked to no one in particular.

"He didn't come to practice today, you didn't know?" Shelley answered.

"I didn't. Thank you." She said as she turned her back to leave. After a

few steps, Laney called her out.

"Hey El! Are you dating Lucas now?" She faced the girls again. She was shocked at the words that came from the girl's mouth. Although she wasn't offended, her heart did flutter a little bit and she felt so weird in her gut.

"What? No..."

"You better not...Cindy here..." Laney said but she was quickly interrupted by Cindy.

"What she wants to say is that you should be careful with Lucas. He's a jerk."

"Thanks, but I think I know Lucas very well..." That she did. She didn't sound rude but she did sound a little bit cold. The three exchanged a look that seemed to tell they were up to no good, but Eleven was totally oblivious to it.

"You should hang out with more people you know... especially with girls... you being friends with those boys makes you weird... I mean we got along pretty well back then right?" Cindy said enthusiastically. She remembered those days when she tried to hang out with them before because she direly wanted to meet Lucas's other friends. She was too demanding, but she was sweet to Lucas. She remembered those days when she had to look at them cuddle and kiss at the lake, and although it was okay for her back then, thinking about it now made her want to puke.

"Hang out with us sometimes!" Laney said.

"Yes, we'll doll you up for Lucas!" Shelley answered earning her a cold stare from Cindy which Eleven saw. She thought it was funny but she didn't laugh, and she thought that out of the three, she liked Shelley best.

"You don't have to." El said.

"Well if you don't want to be pretty for Lucas, then do it for Mike!" Cindy suggested, and El's eyes grew big.

"Yup, which gives me an idea! We have a party tomorrow night at Cindy's house, you should come!" Laney said with a friendly tone.

"But I don't know anyone there..."

"Well you know us! Your senior friends will be there too! I invited Jen, so I'm sure she'll go with Will. I'll ask him to bring Dustin and Mike." Cindy said.

"Lucas?" El asked which made Cindy sigh.

"He usually goes with the football team, but I doubt if he'll go this time. Cindy dumped him, you know?" Shelley said which earned her a nod of approval this time. Cindy must have been so proud at the fact that she dumped one of the most popular guys in school.

"Give me a pen and paper." Cindy commanded El. Eleven quickly rummaged through her backpack for her pen and notebook.

"Here's Shelley's number, now write yours. Shelley here will pick you up tomorrow, okay?" Cindy said, quickly scribbling the contact details while Shelley looked at her quizzically. Eleven wrote down hers too, tore the page from her notebook and handed it over to Shelley.

"We'll see you tomorrow." Cindy declared.

"But I'm not..." El was supposed to say that she's not sure if she can go but the three girls already turned their backs and joined the other cheerleaders who were already leaving the field. She tried to look around the field one more time for Lucas but didn't find him. She looked at the paper she was holding, and hoped that Lucas and Mike will be there.

Meanwhile at the parking lot beside Shelley's car, the trio gathered up for a talk before heading home.

"Ok why do I have to pick her up?" Shelley asked Cindy obviously annoyed at the task appointed to her.

"Because you're the one who has a car Shelley!" Cindy answered sarcastically sending a bout of laughter between her and Laney.

Shelley rolled her eyes and asked another question.

"So, remind me why we're doing this again?"

"Look, keep your fiends close and your enemies closer. She needs to stay away from Lucas and the only way to do that is if she gets back with Mike..." Cindy said proudly.

"And you?" Shelley asked Laney.

"I want to annoy my stepsister... and you have to do it or else we will tell your boyfriend that you made out with his brother. Okay?" Laney said, flipping her hair after. She and Cindy exchanged smirks and Shelley wanted to cry on the spot. She looked at the piece of paper now crumbled in her hand and looked at Eleven's phone number.

"Fine." Shelley finally said.

The next day, on a cloudy Saturday afternoon, as Lucas was heading out of the locker room, his teammates called out to him.

"Hey Lucas! Where are you going?" Miller, their quarterback said while hurrying up to block Lucas's way.

"I'm heading home..." Lucas answered absent-mindedly.

"Lucas, c'mon, we talked about this, it's going to be our first break in weeks! It's Saturday man! Next week we need to hustle again! You need to take a break! We all do." Miller pleaded.

"Look, I'm simply not in the mood and worse you're asking me to go to Cindy's party. That girl's always up to no good, who knows what drama she'll be pulling off this time?" Lucas said.

"Well, your friends are going too from what I've heard. Even that chick...what's her name again? El...?" One of his teammates said which caused Lucas to suddenly pay attention.

It had been a week since Eleven constantly avoided him and he gave her the space she needed. Lucas hadn't talked to Mike for a week as well. He talked several times to Will and Dustin and they said the same thing- Stay out of it. So he did. And every day without El was so

painful he had to stop himself from storming into Mirkwood at the middle of the night for several times this week. He wondered how Mike could stand it.

"El?" Lucas asked.

"Yeah, the tall girl with the long hair, pretty face... a little weird... I heard she's Mr. Perfect's girlfriend?" Miller said referring to Mike as Mr. Perfect which had become his moniker after a handful of achievements he had since last year.

The quarterback referring to El as being highly unlikely to be the object of affection of someone like Mike irked Lucas a little but what irritated him the most was when she was called the girl with the pretty face. It made him realize that aside from him, other guys also find her pretty which heightened his protective instinct towards El especially upon learning that she'd probably go to Cindy's party.

"What? Who told you? And why is she going to Cindy's party?" Lucas asked Miller, but another one of his teammates answered- "Shelley told me, she said that girl went looking for you yesterday during practice, and said Mike's gonna be there."

Shoot, Lucas thought. If they told her that Mike's gonna be there then it's highly likely that she will go.

"She was looking for me?" Lucas asked.

"Yes... Hey, what's going on?" Lucas shook his head. "So are you going or not?" asked Miller.

"We're not going without you man!" said another one.

"Alright, fine." And all of his teammates cheered in loud noises that became inaudible to Lucas as he was deep in his thoughts.

He felt guilty about not going to practice yesterday. He said he was sick, but the truth was, he couldn't take another day seeing El because he missed her so much and he didn't want to bother her.

One week of being away from Eleven made him realize one thing. He can't live without her, and he needed to get her back – whether as a

friend or more than that.

The fact that El went to see him gave Lucas a surge of hope and happiness. Whatever happens at the party, he only had one thing in mind... He will protect El at all cost. He won't let anyone hurt her or take advantage of her, and this time, not even Mike.

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That tender exchange between El and Joyce really had to happen. Sorry if there wasn't any interaction between El and Lucas here but at least they missed each other and that's what's important.

Please brace yourselves for the coming chapter, things will happen, for sure... XOXO -Lucy

6. Don't Let Go

Chapter 6: Don't Let Go

The next day, Eleven just stayed at home and contemplated whether she'd go to Cindy's party or not. At around 3 pm, she received a call from Shelley and they discussed the details of how she can pick her up even if she wasn't sure she'd go yet. She had Shelley's number so she thought she could cancel anytime which she thought would make the girl happy since she didn't sound so enthusiastic about it anyway. She still hasn't got the nerve to call Lucas, but she did call Mike multiple times, and every single time, she was told he was not home, or maybe Mrs. Wheeler was just instructed by her boyfriend or ex-boyfriend, according to Laney, to say so.

She was supposed to meet Shelley on the road which was a little bit close to town at around 7 pm, and she still hasn't made up her mind. It was already 6 pm, and because she didn't want to bother Shelley too much by asking her to pick her up directly from her house, she suggested they just meet along the way which would require her to walk for a good twenty minutes. If she'd go, she needed to get ready by then. At 6:15, she made up her mind to give it a go. Joyce and Hopper were hesitant to let her go but they eventually did upon learning that Will's going to be there too. Will offered her a ride but she politely declined saying Shelley will pick her up. Will was a little bit taken aback by the sudden acquaintance of her sister with the cheerleaders and advised her to be extra careful around them.

Will told himself that he might have to look out for Eleven at the party later and planned to tell his girlfriend about it. They're both running out of quality time for each other as well, but Will was sure that Jen would understand.

Shelley and Eleven arrived at Cindy's house at around 7:30 PM. The house was located almost near the outskirts of Hawkins and it was hard to find. No wonder she needed Shelley to pick her up. She could not have imagined going there by herself. Shelley told her along the way that Cindy's parents were out for the weekend for a business trip in New York and that the house party had complete blessing from her parents. Eleven said Cindy must have had very cool parents to which

Shelley laughed, saying that Cindy's parents had no choice but to let her have the party or else their only daughter would have a fit.

The house was the biggest one she had seen in real life so far. It had two floors and it looked like those country houses she had seen in one of the magazines at the police station. Several cars were already parked at the driveway and Shelley parked along the pavement. Unfamiliar faces had been entering the house and as they made their way inside they were greeted by a dozen people, or two. They went upstairs and walked into what she believed to be Cindy's room seeing the pink wooden letter C on the door. Shelley knocked three times.

"Hello girls..." Laney greeted them cheerfully as she opened the door to Cindy's room. The room was huge and everything in it was pink. It was her first time seeing another girl's room other than Nancy's but she thought it was just the same. It had a pink dresser and pink closets and a big bed with fluffy sheets. Something that was totally unlike hers which had two wooden closets, a wooden dresser that she rarely used and a single bed. The girls welcomed her and she felt good. She felt different. Good different.

"Oh...What are you wearing cowgirl?" Cindy said as soon as she took stepped back and took sight of Eleven.

"I know right?" Laney said, giggling at Cindy.

"Ok wait, get rid of this ugly scarf. Put her hair down." Cindy commanded Shelley, to which the latter quickly obliged. Shelley took off the red scarf covering Eleven's neck and untied her hair.

"Roll her sleeves up... Let that neck breathe..." Shelley, now helped by Laney, rolled her sleeves up until her elbows, and unbuttoned the first two buttons of her shirt showing a little bit of her cleavage.

"Wow... El? Is this a real tattoo?" Shelley asked, pointing at the small numbers printed on Eleven's wrist. Eleven quickly pulled her arm away from her grasp.

"Well, it's nice... I'm planning to have one too." Laney said while shrugging her shoulders and El smiled. *She seems a little nice today*, El thought.

"You have a very good figure, El. You should be on the cheerleading team." Cindy remarked.

"I'm awkward and uncoordinated, so, I don't think that's a good idea..." Eleven said.

"Whatever! Ok, now Laney, work your magic on this face!" Cindy said and Laney led El to a chair in front of the dresser. Cindy and Shelley went outside to welcome the incoming guests while Laney put some make up on her. Laney worked silently and carefully, putting on some subtle earthly colors on El's skin. Eleven was quite familiar with make-up but has not developed a liking to it, probably because Mike didn't like it. She regretted it because she's quite fascinated by it now. She thought maybe she could buy some of her own before Christmas. She couldn't ask the help of Joyce considering she doesn't wear any herself, Nancy is far away at NYU, so she thought maybe she could ask the girls. Laney also fixed her hair making her waves a little bit messier than its usual sleek and clean look. Eleven felt sexy and beautiful and she was like a new person.

"Wow, now you're a woman! Wait 'til Mike sees you!" Laney exclaimed and El felt thrilled more than ever.

They went downstairs to the backyard with the swimming pool and Eleven was surprised at how the number of people doubled up in such a short time. She followed Laney to a group of people sitting on a table beside the pool. She felt out of place in an instant, until Cindy pulled her down on a chair between her and Laney and introduced her to everyone. She didn't see Shelley but she recognized the other girls and boys from her classes and from the cheerleading squad. Some of them gave her a smile while some of them gave her a strange look as if asking what the hell she was doing there.

"Cindy, the football team's here!" Shelley announced as she walked out from the kitchen door leading to the backyard pool with her boyfriend in tow.

"Is Lucas with them?" Cindy asked Laney. Laney just shrugged, stood up and sat beside one of the boys in her class whom she had been crushing on for months. Lucas appeared last and Cindy almost jumped to her feet, while El suddenly wanted to teleport herself to

another world.

"Lucas! Oh my God, I'm so glad you came!" Cindy said enthusiastically as she stood up and threw herself to Lucas. A knot formed in Eleven's stomach and she can't believe that she had been having those feelings again. She wanted to throw Cindy to the pool using her mind but she knew she had to behave.

"Yeah, I am too..." Lucas said sarcastically which made his teammates laugh. Cindy just rolled her eyes. The football team scattered around the house but Lucas set his eyes on only one person. Eleven- whom he had to take a second look at just to convince himself that it was actually her. He was completely shocked at the amazing transformation that El had. In his eyes, El had always been gorgeous but something in the way she looks now completely amazed him. Then, he remembered that they have not talked in a week and was hesitant to approach her, until Cindy dragged him all the way to her group's table and he was able to see Eleven closer. They met eye to eye and Lucas's world almost stopped. They didn't say anything, and there wasn't any need to. They exchanged a smile which meant everything was okay.

"See, we're friends again Lucas, isn't that amazing?" Cindy proudly said, which didn't convince Lucas at all. He just stood there and thought that El didn't need any of the things happening around her. He looked at all the boys around the table and a fire grew inside him.

"El, c'mon I'll take you home..." Lucas said which surprised everybody at the table.

"What? But... I want to stay..." Eleven said, looking at Lucas. Cindy then pulled Lucas away from the group while clutching his arm. Eleven saw how Cindy draped her hands on Lucas's arm and she had to look away.

"See Lucas, we're trying to get them back together..." Cindy whispered to him.

"What?" Lucas replied.

"Remember Laney? She's Louise's step sister and she hates her. Now

when you hate somebody you don't want her to be happy right? But Louise is getting too happy with Mike so..."

"Cindy, I don't think this is a good idea." Lucas cut her right off the moment he understood that Cindy and her friend Laney are just using El to piss somebody off.

"Lucas, El became my friend too, you know, when we were still together... Don't you want your friend to be happy? This is the perfect chance for them to kiss and make-up, don't you think?" Cindy replied getting too close to Lucas now. Lucas thought about it and realized that this might actually work out especially for Eleven. Plus, he didn't want to piss El off since it looked like she was already set on staying. Spending some time with her wouldn't hurt too. He let out a deep sigh and hoped that he isn't making a big mistake on letting El stay.

"Ok, but the moment you pull a trick on El, we're going home. And she stays with me until Mike's here." Lucas told Cindy. He left her and walked to the table, grabbed Eleven's hand and led her away from the group.

Everyone was speechless for a moment and then went back to whatever they were doing. Cindy was left dumbfounded and went straight inside her house, called Jennifer Hayes, and asked her where the hell they were and why the heck they weren't there yet. The senior on the other line said she and Will were just about to leave her house to pick Dustin and Mike up. Cindy told her to hurry up saying Lucas was already there, leaving out the fact that Eleven was there to make sure that Mike would go. Although she said that, in her mind she thought, *Hurry up because El and Lucas are already here and that girl is keeping his attention away from me!* She hated the way Lucas grabbed her hand a moment earlier. She went outside and entertained her guests while she looked around for Lucas and Eleven. She couldn't find them, and her blood boiled.

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Lucas, still unknowingly clutching Eleven's hand found a small, empty, dark spot at the corner of the backyard and led her there.

"El, what are you doing here?" Lucas asked.

"I went to your football practice yesterday but you weren't there, and Cindy invited me."

"Yeah Cindy told me, what I mean is, what are you doing here? What if I weren't here, then you'd be out here by yourself!" Lucas reprimanded El trying so hard to avoid looking at her unbuttoned shirt and the skin that's peeking behind it.

"But Cindy said that Will and Dustin will be here. And... and Mike too..." She looked down upon mentioning Mike's name as if she was ashamed that one of the reasons she was going to a party like this was because of a boy that probably doesn't care about her anymore.

"It doesn't matter if they're going. They themselves do not know most of the people in here... And how did you get here?"

"Shelley picked me up...Along the road..."

"And how did you get to THAT road?"

"I walked..."

"You walked... at this hour, by yourself. Why didn't you tell me you were going here, I should have just picked you up!" Lucas said in panic. Eleven felt overwhelmed and happy and thankful of the person in front of her who undoubtedly cares about her, and in that moment, she totally forgot about the man who took her in his basement several years ago. She knew she wouldn't win that argument so she tried to change the subject instead. She found it fascinating how Lucas was just there glaring at her, and she unconsciously stared right into his eyes. It was dark, but Lucas's eyes were glowing and he had such an aura to him that made El weak on the knees. She could destroy him anytime, anywhere, but she also thought that he was stronger, somehow. She went back to her senses and remembered, out of the blue, the reason why they had to avoid each other for a week.

"Lucas, as far as I can remember, I should be the one mad at you right now for breaking your promise." Eleven said with one eyebrow raised

at his distressed friend, which made the latter soften up and give her a smile.

"Oh, you're mad at me still? So why did you go to my football practice yesterday?" He said mockingly, almost in a flirting tone. Anyone who would see them would think that they'd make out anytime but Lucas chose a spot where they would be far from the prying eyes of Cindy and her gang.

"I don't know... To forgive you." Eleven said with a smile at the corner of her lips.

"I didn't say sorry... I don't intend to..."

"You would have if you saw me... I can forgive you now, just say it."

"Ok. I'm sorry." Lucas said sincerely.

"I'm sorry too, I should have called you... I should have known you just did that to help." El answered feeling a little guilty.

"Let's not talk about that anymore." Lucas said, then realized that they were still holding hands.

He looked at his hand enveloping hers. He held them up and he caressed the top of her hand with his thumb. They were both leaning against the wall now, invisible to the people around them and totally oblivious to the chaos and ruckus their schoolmates were making. He looked at Eleven and wanted to move closer to her. He wanted to embrace her and make up for that one whole week he hadn't been with her. He wanted to kiss her, on her forehead, and tell her everything's going to be okay, that she doesn't need Mike, that he would be there for him always if only she could love her. He wanted to leave and take her away, and go to the lake or anywhere as long as they're together, but instead, he slowly let her hand go. He had to. Eleven gave her a nod but he wasn't too sure what that was for, and he quickly regretted letting her hand go. He should have held on, considering that that night could actually be the last time he would ever have the chance to. The moment Mike arrives, he would be no one to Eleven again.

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She didn't realize that Lucas was still holding her hand and now they were both speechless. Lucas caressed her hand with his and she felt as if tingles of electricity were sent down her spine. Eleven's heart was racing, and she was thankful that it was dark in that spot so that Lucas wouldn't see how all the blood in her body seemed to rush to her face. She knew she had to let go, but she couldn't, she didn't want to. She felt utterly confused now more than ever.

Could it be? Could she actually have feelings for Lucas? Is that even possible? She was fascinated at how people can be that way. How it was possible for a person to love two people at once. Is that even normal, she once asked herself. She wanted to ask Lucas now but of course she can't since he was the person involved this time.

She wanted to move closer to him. Her eyes lingered on his shoulders and she suddenly had the urge to lean her head on them, or on his chest maybe, just to know what it feels like. But then Lucas started to put their hands down. *No, don't let go.* Lucas slowly let her hand go, with some of their fingers still lingering to each other as if they had their own minds and they themselves did not want to let go, but then it did.

Of course, what was I thinking? El thought, slightly disappointed while nodding her head as if she understood that Lucas would probably never look at her more than a friend.

"So... you went here just to see Mike?" Lucas asked El, breaking the silence between them.

"Yes. I miss him. Even after everything, I still miss him." El answered, not even saying that part of the reason why she went here was to see him too. How she missed him the most.

"You also said it'd be nice to have some other friends, right?" She added.

"If you want to have other friends you have to choose wisely... Those girls are up to not good. They're different." Lucas said with a smirk.

"Why, because they're pretty?" El asked.

"What? No, you're better than them El." Lucas answered feeling mad at himself for not choosing his words carefully.

"I kinda like them, especially Shelley."

"Yeah, Shelley's fine, I guess. Well, Will and Dustin have been to these kinds of parties before. Especially Will, I mean c'mon, he's dating Jennifer Hayes. Mike too. I'd bring them every now and then. But only Dustin likes it."

"Do you like it?" El asked curiously, looking around at something that was entirely different from the things that they, and the gang used to do together. They had parties alright, but not this wild. People were drinking, breaking things and making out at the pool and although El had read about them before and actually hated them, she actually thought it was not that bad.

"Yeah, I like it, sometimes. Ummm... By the way, you look different... Who did this to you?" Lucas asked shyly.

"Is it THAT bad?" Eleven asked moving closer to him.

"No... You look gorgeous..." Lucas answered not taking a step back when El moved closer to him. They stayed like that for seconds and before he does anything he'd regret, Lucas blurted out. "How about let's grab some drinks, and while we're at it, maybe I can show you around and introduce you to some people here?"

Eleven nodded and smiled. "Ok, c'mon..." Lucas said while offering his hand. He didn't want to lose her in the crowd, plus, this could be his last chance to hold her hand, might as well grab it.

Eleven just looked at his hand and hesitated. *What if he lets go again? What would I feel then?* El thought. But then again she realized that Mike will be here later, and if everything goes smoothly just as what Laney said, then this would be her last chance to be with Lucas, as she promised herself last night that it would be better to keep her distance from Lucas once she gets back with Mike. She felt guilty as hell just thinking about that.

"You don't want to? Ok fine, I forgot you're not a little girl anymore." Lucas said jokingly while putting his hand down.

"Well, welcome to the jungle, just make sure to follow me, alright?" Lucas said, and when he turned around, he felt someone's hand on his.

"Promise me you won't let go?" El asked. Lucas smiled.

"I promise." Lucas answered.

7. It Was Him

Chapter 7: It was him

Lucas kept his promise and never let Eleven go, except for the time when he had to introduce her to his friends, especially the football team. El felt nervous meeting all those people for the first time. She couldn't even believe that some of the people she met were from her class, which made her realize how much of a loner she had been for the past three years. Lucas did not want to overwhelm El so he kept the socializing to a minimum and broke away from the groups as soon as he realized the discomfort El must have been felt, which the latter deeply appreciated.

They were sipping an unknown concoction of punch from their plastic cups while slicing through the crowd with Lucas intentionally avoiding Cindy at all times, when a bunch of boys behind El pushed each other to the pool. One boy, who didn't plan on getting wet that night, accidentally clung to Eleven's arm which almost made her tumble down the pool, if not for Lucas's quick reflex. Lucas swiftly pulled El into his arms, which had the two locked up in an embrace.

"Hey... You okay?" Lucas asked El.

"Yeah..." El answered in a whisper, looking up at Lucas who had been looking at her so tenderly, and with so much concern that she almost melted. Their height difference was just perfect with her head leveled perfectly to his muscular chest.

"Let's sit over there..." Lucas said, breaking away from their embrace, still holding her hand. He found a small vacant table, away from the crowd of course, and they settled there.

They just sat there looking at all the people around them. They smiled, laughed, and occasionally, grimaced at some of the mishaps happening in front of them, like people getting wasted, being thrown into the pool, or accidentally getting naked. As much as Lucas wanted to cover El's eyes from the horrendousness, he thought it'd be best for her to experience seeing those things. Mike would never had let her, but that's what made them different. He wasn't afraid to show

El the world, both the good and the bad of it. He can protect her, but not deprive her from it. Lucas wished it didn't end. But reality struck back and he knew that any moment then Mike would come to steal the limelight away from him. Then he felt it again, the sadness he felt the week before. The sorrow he never felt would come to him every time he realized El would never be hers. He knew that eventually, he had to let go.

"El, thank you." Lucas said.

"For what?" El asked totally clueless and somehow nervous at the sudden change in her best friend's expression. He looks serious now and almost looks depressed.

"For this... just being with me. I mean, it's not like a date or something, but still, it means a lot... But... I should probably go when Mike gets here." Lucas said while staring blankly at nothing in particular.

"Why do you have to go? Stay, Lucas... If anyone should get out of here, it should be me... I never should have gone here in the first place just to see him. I don't even know if he'd actually talk to me. Lucas, you and Mike have been friends the longest. It makes me feel bad that this happened because of me." El said apologetically.

"It didn't happen because of you El. It happened because of US..." Lucas said. Eleven can't say anything while she fought back the tears. Deep inside, she blamed herself. She felt like she had torn their friendship apart because of her weakness, her inability to stand up for herself, to understand things, for her ignorance. She felt so empty. She might actually lose both of them and just the thought of it made her nauseous.

"When everything's back to normal, I mean when you and Mike are back together...I...I think I should keep my distance from you. I don't want Mike to misunderstand anything. It'd also be a good chance for you to be the big girl you've always wanted to be." Lucas said with the last statement meant to be a joke but Eleven obviously had none of it. If anything, she looked upset and Lucas became anxious and tried to calm her down.

"Hey Eleven, look at me. We're still gonna be friends, okay? It's just that... some things have to change... Trust me, it's the best way I can help you... If I stay out of the way..." Lucas said not knowing if he should actually take it back or not. From the expression on El's face, he knew that he should apologize and tell Eleven to just forget everything that he said, but it was too late.

Eleven heard each and every word that came out of Lucas's mouth and she wished she hadn't. She wished she had covered her ears to stop those words from resonating into her mind. She didn't know it would hurt that much.

If I stay out of the way... Those were the last words that she heard from Lucas, and it came to her like a huge blow that she had to stand up and escape the crowded place.

"Eleven?" Lucas asked looking up at Eleven who suddenly stood up. She was off balance for a second and Lucas held her arm to settle her down. Eleven looked at her coldly, then she eyed Lucas's hand that holds her arm. She gently shrugged it off.

"I need to go to the bathroom." She said, then walked away. Lucas was left there simply dumbfounded, not knowing what to do with his flustered friend. He wanted to go after her but he knew better. If he provoked her more, worse things will come about. Instead he stayed there and tried to process what transpired.

He might have just ruined it for him and El. But he knew that was the only way. He just had to do it. For him. For Mike. And for Eleven.

"Hey Cindy, the seniors are here!" One of the girls from the cheerleading squad shouted out to Cindy from across the porch.

"Oh this is gonna be fun!" Cindy said while she leapt to her feet and went to the living room to welcome them, followed by Laney.

"Hi Jen, hi Will!" Cindy greeted them enthusiastically and the couple greeted her back. They looked at each other looking so surprised at how happy Cindy was to see them.

Cindy saw familiar faces... Jen's, Will's, and Dustin's. Her face lit up

when she saw Mike behind Dustin and then suddenly went gloomy when another face appeared beside Mike's. It was Louise. She gave a quick glance to Laney who was equally shocked to see her step-sister there.

"Hi Laney, thanks for inviting us..." Louise said cheerily not minding the expression of the two juniors. She was actually used to them by now, although she must say, she's a little bit intrigued why it seemed like Cindy and Laney didn't want her there.

"Umm... I brought her with me. It's cool right?" Mike said.

"Yeah that's cool... Well, enjoy the party. I guess..." Cindy said.

"Thanks. C'mon Mike, they have a balcony upstairs. We can talk there..." Louise said. She met the awkward gazes from Mike's friends.

"Mike doesn't like crowded places. That's okay Cindy right?" Louise asked the dejected girl.

"Umm yeah sure...whatever." Cindy answered then walked out of the room. Laney, who gave her step-sister a cold stare who then gave her a smirk and a shrug in return followed after her.

As Mike and Louise made their way upstairs, Dustin saw Will shaking his head, giving the two a suspicious look.

"Hey Will. C'mon, let's go inside." Dustin said trying to divert Will's attention away from them.

"What's going on with Mike and Louise?" Will asked.

"Nothing, Will. Chill out." Dustin answered while slapping Will's chest with the back of his hand. Jen rolled her eyes totally unimpressed by Dustin's antics. The three of them started their way towards the backyard where most of the people were.

"Look Dustin, just because he and El are taking some time off doesn't mean he can fool around with other girls." Will said sternly while they were walking.

"Will, can you just let that brother of ours live for once? Please? It's

not like he's going to sleep with her or something." Dustin said while eyeing all the girls they passed by.

"Wow Dustin. I didn't know you were a total jerk." Jennifer snapped.

"Thank you." Dustin said sarcastically. "Now, where are those girls?" He mumbled as he headed into the crowd.

Will and Jen followed him grabbing some drinks and talking to some of the people they knew. They continued to roam around the yard until they found a dispirited Lucas slouched on a chair in one corner.

"Hey Lucas! I didn't know you were here..." Will said as he rushed to him. Lucas saw him and he let out a big sigh. He stood up and looked at the two of them.

"So... Where's Mike?" Lucas asked.

"Mike's upstairs, at the balcony." Will said.

"With Louise..." Jennifer added.

"With who now?" Lucas asked.

"With that girl he's been flirting with since last month..." Jennifer Hayes answered.

"Jennifer!" Will exclaimed.

"What? You don't want Lucas to know? Huh, I wonder what El would say if she finds out what Mike's been up to lately." Jen said. The mention of El's name sent a streak of horror into Will and Lucas's face and she looked at them with furrowed brows as if asking what the hell is going on.

"Eleven..." Lucas said almost in a whisper.

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"Shit, I forgot El's gonna be here!" Will panicked. He ran his hand through his hair and searched the faces of the people around them hoping he would just miraculously see Eleven right there and then so he could drag her out from that house and take her home.

Eleven said she'll go to the bathroom which was upstairs, and if Lucas's memory served him right, it was right across the balcony-where Mike and that girl were then. He had to move. Quickly.

"She's also upstairs..." Lucas murmured.

"What? We have to tell Mike!" Jen asked trying hard to contain her shock.

"No, it's too late. Lucas, just get her now. We'll find Dustin. Let's meet at our house." Will said hoping that Eleven won't bump into Mike and Louise. Even if they all trusted Mike, they knew that it wouldn't hurt to be too careful.

"Will, if anything happens, just create a diversion... We can't lose her again." Lucas said and Will nodded totally understanding the stipulations of what's going to happen if something went wrong.

Lucas hurried inside the house while Jen and Will looked for Dustin. They saw him cracking up some jokes to a group of girls who actually found him amusing. When Will told him about the situation, he was so distressed because he was making such progress in entertaining the girls but he remembered who they were dealing with. It's El- the freak. They went outside Cindy's house and waited for Lucas and El, hoping for the best.

Eleven

Eleven just finished using the bathroom and just wanted to be left alone. Of all the things she wanted to be that time, she just wanted to be invisible. She contemplated on what Lucas had told her, about keeping a distance from her. It broke her heart because she herself knew that that could be the only way for her to be a better person for everybody, and eventually to let all her vague and confusing feelings for Lucas go.

She knew she loved Mike, but Lucas was special. Lucas was also Mike's best friend who probably would not even love her like she would sometimes want him to.

She probably spent almost fifteen minutes there so she decided to go back, face Lucas again, and even if she wanted to just go home, she thought it'd be best to wait for Mike and try to talk to him for a while. Maybe, just maybe, it could lead to getting things right again.

She was just about to get out when she heard people talking in the balcony. Two people, it seemed. And the other one was vaguely familiar. She moved closer and stood behind the door that leads to it. They were standing there. Looking down at the back yard. She would never not know that voice and that back. And he was with another girl. Louise.

There was no mistake. It was Mike.

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8. Letting Go

Chapter 8: Letting Go

They were just standing there for 10 minutes looking down at the people in the backyard. It was dark, so they can't make out the faces of the people there but they can definitely tell that everyone was having a great time. It was the first time in weeks when they can just stand still like that and do nothing. They cherished every moment of it.

"So... have you made your decision yet? Louise asked Mike.

"I'm thinking Penn state... It's closer." Mike answered.

"But you've been talking non-stop about MIT. Are you sure? Is it because of El?" Louise asked without hesitation. She had been avoiding asking Mike about El but she cared too much for Mike and hated how dispirited he had been lately because of her. If Mike didn't want to open up then she had just got to ask him. At first he was hesitant to answer, but he did nonetheless.

"Partly, yes." Mike said while slowly nodding his head.

"So... your life decisions depend on a girl?" Louise said.

"She's not just some girl, Louise. It's just that... I can't be too far away from her... She won't make it."

"Why? Are you her baby-sitter or something?" Louise asked sarcastically. Mike just gave him a cold glance obviously insulted by what she said. Although he knew she didn't mean it, he felt somewhat ashamed because deep inside, he knew there was a ring of truth to it. It's actually what he really felt-that he was baby-sitting someone. For how long he felt that way- that he didn't know.

Louise noticed that it offended Mike a bit and asked him another question. She wanted to keep the conversation going.

"Then why did you break up with her?" She asked. Mike just let out a big sigh and closed his eyes. Then he stood up straight and turned his

head up to the sky. He was like that for a few seconds until he felt Louise's hand on his shoulder. It gave him a shiver and he felt guilty in an instant. He quickly opened his eyes and looked beside him and was a bit taken aback by how close Louise was to him. He faced her and her arm dropped from his shoulder but the girl didn't back away. They were standing very close to each other and Mike was shaking.

Why did I break up with her? He, too, then asked himself. He unconsciously found the answer that was long buried in his mind and heart, and he just started to let it out.

"It's suffocating. And I felt that I gave too much of myself, that I don't even know what I'd do without her. But it feels empty... And lifeless... I don't know myself anymore. I don't even know what I want." He said grudgingly.

"You do know what you want, Mike. What you want is to go to MIT. Right? C'mon I'll keep it a secret." Louise said while searching for Mike's eyes. It took him a moment to answer the question as if he had to digest it first and consult his deepest thoughts for an answer. When he thought he found it, he started nodding to himself.

"Yes... God! I really want to go to MIT..." Mike almost shouted as he backed away and put both his hands on the back of his head. He ran his fingers through his hair with a thin smile. Oddly, he found comfort, and though it felt weird, he was thankful and relieved. Finally, he said it out loud.

"Then you should go there... you're more than qualified. Let's mail our applications tomorrow. I already got the forms last week. I got one for you too. I'll prepare the second part of our experiment tomorrow so I just want you to relax tonight, okay?" Louise said, thankful she was able to get the answer she wanted to hear. Mike turned to face Louise again and looked her in the eyes.

"Thank you. For once, it's just so nice to be with someone who's..."

"In control? Who could really help you out? Who you do not have to take care of all the time?" Louise said sincerely and Mike nodded.

"I hate myself for feeling this way." Mike said.

"Mike, it's not your fault. You have your own life too. I'll help you. Do yourself a favor and just relax now and have fun with me okay?" Louise said as she put her hands on Mike's shoulders slowly sliding them on the back of his neck. Mike knew what was coming.

"No Louise I can't."

"Mike, relax... it's just between us... I feel exhausted too, you know. Just for tonight, forget about everything. Forget about her..." Louise said. She gave him a short peck on the lips first and smiled at him after. Although his mind told him to step back, he didn't. Instead, Mike did what Louise told her to do. He forgot about Eleven, his friends, his family and the world. He let his worries go and soon enough his lips found hers.

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Eleven heard everything, and the whole time she was just clutching her chest with both hands as if her heart would come out any time. It wasn't winter yet but she felt ice cold and even if she wanted to move, her feet were planted firmly on the ground. She was facing them, and she was completely invisible behind the curtains of the slightly opened glass door leading to the balcony. She was breathing deeply and slowly-so afraid to make a noise that will reveal her presence. Then the unthinkable happened and all the air in her lungs were suddenly gone as she saw Mike put her hands on Louise's back as they drown in their deep kiss. She stopped breathing for a moment. She was choking, but she needed to restrain herself.

Not here. -she thought. There were way too many people. But she can't take it in any more.

The monster... It's coming out again...

A few seconds later and she knew that she won't be able to hold it in. It was either she'd die or all the people in the house will. In that moment of despair, she could only think of one person she wanted to say goodbye to. But his time it wasn't Mike. It was Lucas.

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Lucas ran upstairs and immediately saw Eleven's silhouette in front of the balcony. She was a few yards away and it was dark but he can see that she wasn't moving at all. Suddenly the lights around him flickered and he was filled with indescribable terror.

No... It can't be...

He didn't know what to do and he went into a state of oblivion. Then he heard a voice in his mind. Someone was calling out his name. It was Eleven, and just like that he was brought back into his senses and he sprinted towards El.

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She prepared for her destruction until she felt a strong force enveloping her. Her mind was jarred and she felt dizzy, and although she felt numb, she didn't feel as cold as before as the body that protected her not only drowned the monster in but also gave her warmth. She looked up a bit and saw Lucas towering above her. Embracing her and stroking her back, whispering things that made her go back to life.

"El... relax... relax... c'mon, let's get out of here..." Lucas said. She turned her around, so he was now facing the balcony, and he saw what caused Eleven to go into a state of shock that could have potentially sent them all to their demise. He was burning with anger but he didn't waste any time. When he thought she was ready, they started to leave.

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Eleven was walking but she felt like she was floating in mid-air. She closed her eyes for she trusted him. She's with Lucas now, and she felt safe more than ever. Lucas carried her down the stairs and could have carried her all the way outside but didn't want any attention. He took Eleven outside as fast as he can.

"Lucas! There you are... What happened? Eleven?" Will said as he walked towards Lucas who held El tight into his arms. Eleven was pale as snow and Will felt a pang of anger inside him. Jen and Dustin were speechless.

"Step aside." Lucas commanded. Will got out of the way as Lucas opened his car door to let El in. Will knew that something bad had happened, and there might be a chance that Lucas and El won't be there when they head home. Before Lucas could go inside his car, Will clutched his arm.

Although he didn't tell him, Will knew how Lucas felt for his sister. He didn't approve for he knows how tight Mike and Lucas's friendship was. He wanted to tell Lucas to stay out of it, but even he knew that at that moment, only Lucas could help Eleven.

"Lucas... Just don't do anything stupid... Know where you stand." Will warned while looking at him straight in the eye. Lucas shrugged his arm almost violently.

"Tell that to Mike..." Lucas said.

And then, they were gone.

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9. It Has

Chapter 9: It Has

As soon as they got to the lake, El blasted the car door open and went straight to the small pier on the lake. She hovered by the end of the wooden plank as if about to dive in the water but she didn't. She just looked down at her reflection glimmering on the water with the help of the radiant moon, and all she saw was the gloomy person that she was, and she screamed at the top of her lungs. A surge of wind came that sent trees to a tremble and sent all the frightened flying creatures away. The water shook and little waves formed causing a painful and melancholy sound. The nature surrounding Eleven seemed to be crying with her as it grows more weary with every scream she let out. Then she heard footsteps from behind.

"Lucas, don't go near me... please..." El warned.

"El... it's not safe. Someone might see you... Let's talk about this." Lucas pleaded. El turned around and walked a few steps towards him.

"I don't want to talk! All you people do is talk!" El shouted as the wind became stronger. Millions of water droplets floated in the air, which totally left Lucas mesmerized for a moment. If he was his 12-year old self he would've jumped up and down out of delight for witnessing such majesty. But he wasn't 12 anymore.

"Eleven! You know what will happen. If you use your power again you might open another gate. People will get hurt. The state will get you. We cannot let that happen El... Please..." Lucas once again pleaded. Eleven slowly came around and looked around her. She slowly shook her head. Lucas knew then that she felt guilty and horrified, but he also knew that Eleven didn't have the will to stop. She was mad.

"Don't stop me now. Just let them get me, Lucas..." Eleven said. Lucas felt defeated. He fell silent and then decided he would have to do something else.

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"He's not worth it..." Lucas said as he slowly walked towards Eleven. Eleven pleaded with her eyes as if telling Lucas to back away but he didn't.

"I could kill you, Lucas", she warned.

"Then kill me. If that's the only way I can save you..." Lucas said with a blunt affect.

Then the thought of Lucas dying suddenly brushed into El's mind, and she clutched her heart out of grief. Her legs shook and her knees dropped to the ground. As soon as she did, the wind stopped. And this time, she cried. Tears came running out of her eyes as the water droplets that floated earlier rained upon them. The trees and the lake became still, and the only noise you can hear is a girl crying.

Lucas walked towards her and dropped into his knees. El didn't want to look up so Lucas cupped her face with both hands so that he could look her in the eyes and tell her that everything's okay. But when he saw how miserable she was, he was dumbfounded and couldn't say a word.

"Why?" El asked.

"What do you mean why?" Lucas asked back with a faint smile.

"Why would you die for me?" Eleven asked again.

"I don't want to lose you... again..." Lucas answered.

"Then I'd lose you...and..." Eleven said as she started to cry again... Lucas embraced her and waited until she calmed down. He then slowly stood up and led El to the end of the pier. They sat there with their legs dangling several feet from the water. After some time, El rested her head on Lucas's shoulder-the thing she always liked to do. They both didn't know how long they stayed that way but this time, it was El who broke the silence between them.

"Why can't you lose me Lucas?" She asked. Lucas smiled and let out a small sigh. El lifted her head up from his shoulder and looked at him with those big bright eyes... Lucas almost drowned in them and his heart fluttered. He felt ashamed but then felt tired of being ashamed. He knew he can't lie anymore and he didn't plan on doing so.

"Well.... you may have come back for Mike, but he's not the only one who waited for you El... I also did. I also went back and forth to the woods looking for you. I also spent sleepless nights having nightmares of the Demogorgon taking you away. And I didn't even love you, then. That time, I just wanted to have my cool friend back..." he said.

"But now, it's different. You see, people change, El. Their age, their dreams, what they look like, what they feel..." He added.

"You think Mike's feelings have changed?" El sincerely asked. Lucas flinched at the sound of his name, and a fire grew inside him, but he tried to stay calm for El.

"I can't really answer that..." Lucas answered.

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"How about yours?" Eleven asked as he searched his eyes for the truth as if she knew he would tell a lie.

Lucas was taken aback and even if he tried to answer with composure, he couldn't.

"Well it...it... might not be the best time to-"

"Lucas... Has your feelings about me changed?" Eleven interrupted. Lucas knew that he had no other choice but to spill the truth. Lucas closed his eyes first and then opened them after a few seconds. Then, he faced Eleven, slowly nodded and said.

"Yes, it has." Lucas said.